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Program for Commemorating
the 150th Anniversary of the
Conquest of the Old Northwest



Recommended by

H. VAN BUREN MAGONIGLE,
Architect and Planner of Memorials

In a Report to

THE GEORGE ROGERS CLARK COMMISSION
for the
150th Anniversary of the Conquest
of the Old Northwest

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September 9, 1926.

THE GEORGE ROGERS CLARK COMMISSION,
Indianapolis, Indiana.

Gentlemen:

I have the honor to report that at your request I have made a careful survey of the site of Fort Sackville in the City of Vincennes, Indiana, of the city itself, and of the river banks opposite, in order that I might advise you upon an appropriate Memorial to commemorate the taking of the Fort by George Rogers Clark and the consequent addition to the United States of a vast region now comprising several of the most populous, prosperous, and enlightened States of the Union.

It is the latter circumstance which takes the event to be commemorated out of the sphere of mere local significance, and raises the man who conceived the campaign, and carried it out against heavy odds, to national fame and a place beside Washington and Jefferson. For had Clark not taken Fort Sackville, the territory now containing the States of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan and Wisconsin would in all likelihood have remained in British possession and be now a part of Canada; the Louisiana Purchase would perhaps never have been possible and it might well have happened that the United States of America would be today a comparatively small group of seaboard communities with a vast hinterland of alien population.

In view of these circumstances I conceive it to be my duty to advise you to take a very large view of the problem and to make your plans upon a scale commensurate with the national importance of the event you propose to commemorate in some enduring form.

Let me hasten to add in this connection that I do not advise a colossal undertaking. The most difficult factor in the problem you have asked me, as a professional esthetician, to solve for you is: How to reconcile the scale of the modest City of Vincennes having a population of twenty-five or thirty thousand souls with that of a Memorial in which the entire nation of one hundred and ten millions will have a real and vital interest. It is evident that the Memorial proper must be of such a size and scale that it will not look out of place in its environment. For mere size must therefore be substituted Quality—quality in design, in material, in finish, in spirit, and feeling.

Upon analysis the whole problem, which is large in scope, seems to me to resolve itself into three principal categories: First, the George Rogers Clark Memorial and its immediate entourage; Second, the new bridge it is proposed to build across the Wabash River at this historic point; and Third, the reclamation of the river front of Vincennes with the matters thereby involved, and which would have a profound influence upon the future of the city, its health, beauty, convenience, and consequent prosperity.

In the first, your Commission is most directly interested; in the second, the two States of Indiana and Illinois; in the third, the City of Vincennes—which is also vitally interested in all three. Each of these elements while closely interrelated may be discussed here as separate units. Each is of such importance to the others that they must all be treated and thought of as parts of one harmonious com-

position; and it is of the highest importance that all the States and communities interested or affected, and all their public and private agencies for carrying such a program into effect should be enlisted as soon as possible in the realization of the entire program.

Four our present convenience I will deal with them here under the three heads suggested:

The George Rogers Clark Memorial and Its Setting

It is a sine qua non of any Memorial project that the Memorial proper should have an adequate setting. My recommendations as to the acquisition of property for an adequate site must of course be based upon existing conditions that may or may not prove to be controlling. The most important factor to be considered in the consideration of the problem as a whole is the proposed new bridge. I am given to understand that there is some local sentiment in favor of having the bridge cross the river at Main Street, the site of the present bridge. Upon the other hand the Highway Commissions of the two States have decided upon a crossing at Vigo Street. Upon the ultimate decision your own decisions must inevitably be predicated.

After the most careful thought I am constrained to say that the logic of the situation, in my opinion, points to Vigo Street as the Indiana approach to the proposed bridge. We must envisage that bridge as carrying an immense traffic in the very near future, fed not only by the State Highway systems of Indiana and Illinois, but also by the new Memorial Highway, of which some portions are already constructed, designed to follow the line of the Odyssey of the Lincoln family and to link the birthplace of Lincoln with his grave at Springfield. The ford by which they crossed the Wabash is said to be at Vigo Street; Fort Sackville was undoubtedly built at this point to command the passage of this ford—for there would appear to be no other strategic reason for the construction of the Fort just there. This Lincoln Road will bring thousands of motorists who will wish to follow the route taken by Lincoln's family through Vincennes every year. We must reckon also with a vastly increased and ever-growing business traffic, inter-city bus lines, and the rapidly developing pleasure traffic—and we must not forget that with the construction of the Clark Memorial Vincennes will become itself a point of pilgrimage and the tides of traffic will be swelled accordingly. All this should be faced now and prepared for.

Vigo Street may be easily widened to the dimension necessary to a great Interstate Highway without undue expense. Main Street cannot be widened without a loss of property values that make such a proposition unreasonable in view of the possibilities offered by Vigo Street. The latter is also free of the street cars that are an intolerable obstruction to mobile traffic. It would be a grave error in city planning to turn the enormous floods of traffic that will converge upon Vincennes in the near future through a narrow business street like Main, where local use of the street for shopping and its concomitant parking will, in ever-increasing measure, tend in itself to congest this street far beyond the point of comfort and convenience. As a motorist of some experience and a student of city plan I have observed that in those towns where the principal routes are so laid out as to force one to pass through the main business streets and centers, the visitor is so intent upon the dangers to be avoided

in the congested traffic, and the cars are parked so densely along the curbs, that not only does the town make an unpleasant impression upon the visitor, but he is unable to make the purchase which merchants fondly and fallaciously hope the passing motorist will make. It is far better for the visitor, for the merchant, for the city, to have the through traffic follow a route parallel with the principal business center, and close enough thereto to permit parking on the boulevard and a short walk of a block to the shops. For this most important interdependent function Main and Vigo Streets are admirably related. Vigo Street should be restricted by law to residential uses and thus preserve its character as a boulevard, and protect the values of the business properties on Main Street.

This may seem a digression, but it is really a preliminary to the statement that for these reasons I am impelled to state my conviction that Vigo Street is the proper and logical approach to the new bridge. The fact that the Highway Commissions have already chosen it merely makes its realization the easier.

Upon the assumption that Vigo will be and should be the approach to the bridge I recommend the acquisition for a Memorial Park of the terrain bounded on its Westerly side by a line continuing the westerly property line of Dubois Street, on the Easterly side by a line continuing the westerly side of the alley running between Vigo and Main from Second Street to First; on the Northerly side by the Wabash, and on the South by the Southerly side of South Second Street; although the church properties bounded by Church, Barnett, First and Second Street lie within these limits, they are in themselves of a character which bring them into harmonious relations without the necessity of purchase.

I set the Easterly boundaries of this area as I do because it is obvious that the bridge approaches should be free of any buildings immediately adjacent thereto, and that they should be parked on both sides. If it proves to be possible to extend the easterly line to the westerly side of Main Street I should cordially approve such action.

The rectangle I have outlined would, then, constitute a Park Reservation linked, we may hope, to the Easterly end of town by a parkway along the river bank connecting up the Harrison Homestead and Harrison Park and beyond; to the west with the Evansville Road and the Dixie Highway; and to the South through Vigo Street with Sixth.

The Indiana side of the bridge would begin in this park. Coming from Illinois this Park would be a beautiful welcoming gateway to the City of Vincennes—and crossing the other way one would retain a gracious memory of it. Due to the requirements of the War Department the height of the roadbed above high water must be such that the bridge must begin at or about Second Street.

Second Street should be widened on its river side from Main Street to the Alley next West, so that the Cathedral would then center upon it. A Square or Plaza should be created in front of the Cathedral out of which the bridge would lead. The portico originally planned for the facade of the Cathedral should be built, to give the building added architectural importance. Thus disposed, the Square which might very appropriately be called Gibault Square in honor of Pere Gibault, becomes the entrance to the Memorial Park.

The Cathedral, with the added dignity of the portico, would close the long vista of Second Street adequately and mark the Memorial area for the entire city to the East.

The existing streets in the Park Area would of course be vacated, and the old French Cemetery would then to all intents and purposes be absorbed in the Park, and the Gardens back of the Cathedral and Library would also seem to be a part of it although preserving their private character. The block bounded by Dubois, Barnett, Second and First Streets would act, when properly planted, as a protection against possible undesirable neighbors.

It is needless to say that the use of all properties abutting on the Memorial Park should be carefully restricted by law as to use, occupation, height, character and the like.

I do not feel that the mere creation of a park that would preserve the site of Fort Sackville is adequate to commemorate such an important event as the winning of the empire George Rogers Clark secured for the United States. I think a structure is necessary that shall be a Shrine of Pilgrimage and be the center of interest in the scheme. Its probable location would be about midway between the Old French Cemetery and the river bank and probably center, the other way, on Barnett Street.

I recommend that the Memorial be a building (not a shaft, arch, replica of Fort Sackville or other form) to be described more in detail as to character hereinafter. It should be preceded by a Forecourt of great beauty and dignity so planned that it may be overlooked from the bridge. Ample provision for parking of automobiles must be made of course; the space under the bridge approach and immediately adjacent thereto would probably be found to lend itself admirably to such uses.

There should be no driveways in the Park itself except for the Boulevard along the river bank and a necessary connection from Gibault Square. All visitors should enter the park on foot.

Provision should and could easily be made for personal monuments to the principal personages connected with the early history of this vast inland empire—to Clark, Vigo, Gibault as already cited, Harrison, Tecumseh, Pere Marquette and the other pioneers whose names and deeds are a part of the nation's heritage.

But it seems to me that some record of the incidents in the discovery, conquest, and development of this lovely and fertile part of our land is required as the Memorial of the capture of Fort Sackville and thereby of Clark's part in that drama. It should be of such a nature that not only all of the five states carved out of the territory, but the several others whose connection with its history is easily established, could find their place, their part, and their interest in it.

I therefore suggest and recommend a Hall of History, of simple and dignified exterior, the interior to consist of a single great room of noble dimensions and proportions; its sole decoration to consist in a series of mural paintings on a grand scale, depicting every event of major importance connected with the discovery and development of the conquered territory. For by no other means than painting can this stirring drama be made clear and plain to the people for them to read in all the years to come. This is the general idea; the

details of architectural character, of dimensions, of material, of lighting, should be the subject of the most careful study.

The Proposed New Bridge Across the Wabash River

The new bridge, beginning as it does on the Indiana side, in the proposed Memorial Park, will be an element of the first importance. It will carry an immense traffic from both sides of the river and must be of a width that will easily take this traffic, with its inevitable rapid increase, for many years to come. The roadway should not be narrower than that of the Lincoln Road already referred to, which I understand has been made double the width of the usual broad highway. This country is full of narrow bridges which constrict traffic and make it extremely dangerous, either because the bridges are old and were built before the highways were widened or, if new, made too narrow from lack of foresight or from motives of false economy.

I have had the privilege of inspecting a sketch for this bridge at the offices of the Bridge Department of the State Highway Commission in Indianapolis. This design was undoubtedly made before the George Rogers Clark Memorial project was inaugurated, for it is of a strictly utilitarian nature, and the engineers would undoubtedly wish to bring it into harmony with the proposed Clark Memorial. It should be made a memorial bridge and be a monumental structure; this does not mean that it should have elaborate architectural treatment or adornments of sculpture and the like; it need only be made simple and graceful and therefore beautiful. Some of the most beautiful bridges in the world are the simplest in design.

The fact that this bridge will be on the direct line of the journey of the Lincoln family from Abraham Lincoln's birthplace to his last resting place at Springfield, Illinois, immediately suggests making it a Lincoln Memorial, and giving it a character worthy of this name. It would be nothing less than a tragedy if this bridge were not made a thing of beauty. It will be in such close proximity to the George Rogers Clark Memorial that a mere utilitarian structure of iron trusses perched on slender concrete piers would ruin the entire picture. I strongly advise that your Commission make every effort to induce the States of Indiana and Illinois to erect a worthy bridge at this point. Unless you can succeed in so doing, I should be strongly inclined to recommend that you do not attempt to build an important memorial structure at or near the site of Fort Sackville. It would be far better to go to the other end of the town and build a Memorial in Harrison Park. Whereas, with a bridge of the proper character, the Memorial and the bridge can be made parts of an unusual and striking composition. I cannot emphasize too strongly my belief that the question of this bridge is vital to the success of your Memorial. As designed, it is of very important dimensions; there are four out-shore spans of something over 197 feet and with the shore approaches will be at least 1,200 feet long. There is an opportunity here for a structure that will redound to the credit of the States of Indiana and Illinois, and to their Highway Commissions as well. If the question is properly presented to the people of the States, I believe they would rise to the occasion and meet it adequately.

In the Square which should be planned at the end of the bridge on the Indiana side could very appropriately be placed statues of Vigo and Pere Gibault. On the Illinois shore I would suggest a plaza, architecturally treated, as a memorial of Clark's capture of Kas-

kaskia, an event in which the State of Illinois, of course, takes a natural pride; it would seem that just here is the proper place to record the event rather than on the Indiana shore; and it would link the two major events of Clark's campaign in a most appropriate manner.

I repeat here the suggestion to acquire the property between Vigo Street and the alley between that street and Main Street, so that this bridge will have its origin on the Indiana side in a park which will immensely add to the effect of the approach in both directions.

The Reclamation of the River Front and Like Matters

The reclamation of the river front is very intimately related to your Memorial problem, because unless radical changes are made your Memorial will lack the full measure of dignity and beauty it must possess if it is to be built at all. I was immensely impressed with the opportunity which offers itself to the City of Vincennes to make a really beautiful park along the river bank and reclaim, for the benefit of all its citizens, a spot of natural beauty. When analyzed, there are comparatively few industrial plants now established along the river that would make their removal to other locations difficult or expensive. In fact, in this respect Vincennes is singularly fortunate. There are many communities in which sites of natural beauty have been pre-empted by business and manufacturing to such a degree that restoration of such spots to the use of beauty and health have seemed almost hopeless—and yet, many such communities have girded up their loins and accomplished the seemingly impossible. Here, however, the problem is comparatively simple and the solution easy.

In the first place, it is unthinkable that the railroad spur which now runs along the entire river bank down to and just beyond the gas works at the corporation line to the West could possibly be allowed to remain. The passage of locomotives belching volumes of black smoke between the Clark Memorial and the river would be intolerable; and yet this track is necessary to the existence of the various industrial plants along the river. What then is the answer? It is that these plants are in the wrong place, always were in the wrong place, and should be transferred to another locality. With the removal of the plants the railroad spur is, of course, unnecessary, and would be removed. I therefore recommend that your Commission advise the City of Vincennes, its Chamber of Commerce, and any other civic bodies interested, to undertake immediately a study of this problem. New locations for these factories on flat land in the Southwest of the city should be secured by the city, and a new and modern factory district be planned on scientific lines (similar in principle to the Bush Terminal Development in Brooklyn, New York) where raw and manufactured products can be handled with the maximum efficiency.

The gas works now situated on the city line just West of your proposed Memorial could, of course, be fed from the other direction; but they should be removed altogether from this location and placed somewhere else. To build a beautiful Memorial structure, with these unsightly gas tanks and huge chimneys as a background, is painful to contemplate. Recognition of the fact that the gas works may remain for some time is one reason why I recommend setting

the Westerly boundary of the Memorial Park for the present on the West side of Dubois Street, so that the Memorial area may be kept as far away from this eye-sore as possible. They should, of course, be removed as soon as practicable and the entire area they occupy, plus the territory between Dubois and Nicholas Streets and Lower First Street and the River, should be thrown into a riverside park.

With the tracks and the factories removed from the river bank, Vincennes will then find itself in possession of a beautiful parkway along the lovely Wabash river, linked to the Evansville Road by Willow Street and by Terre Haute Road to the twin bridges at the State Highway.

The choice of several direct routes to the bridge is then offered on the Indiana side—along a new Boulevard following the reclaimed river front—along Second Street through the Easterly part of the City to Vigo Street and Cathedral Square—via Sixth Street to Vigo and then to the bridge—and by the Dixie Highway and Evansville Road to Willow Street and thus to the Park.

Public Celebration Attending the Dedication of the Memorial

As to the form that the ceremonies of dedication and celebration might take, it is my opinion that the final plan of the building and its entourage will strongly affect, in the physical sense, the details of such ceremonies. It will be readily seen that great throngs of people uncontrolled, might easily do serious damage to the Memorial and surroundings. In spite of careful policing by many troops, the grounds of the McKinley Memorial at Canton, Ohio, were badly damaged by the crowds who broke through the restraints imposed upon them.

So far as I have been able to visualize the appropriate kind of ceremony, it seems to me that a series of pageants representing the various historical events that may be decided upon as proper to record by Mural Paintings in the Hall of History, would be most attractive. These pageants might be repeated once every three weeks, or every month, throughout the summer season of the year of dedication; and by judicious advertising it would be possible for people from many States to time their outings so as to bring them to Vincennes for one of these occasions, of which each might be of two or three days' duration; the entire series of pageants being produced at each. We should have here to contend with a difficulty, perhaps, in assuring ourselves of the services of the professional actors who must inevitably be employed to form the framework of any such pageantry. For the crowds we could depend upon local talent well drilled, but the principal characters should by all means be taken by professionals. A pageant, whether performed but once or many times, would inevitably attract vast crowds and this immediately suggests staging it, not at the Memorial or in the Memorial Park, but perhaps in the fields to the West of the site, on the river bank, or on floats on the river itself. The river should, of course, be utilized to the fullest as part of the settings of such pageantry.

The details must, of course, be determined by long and careful thought and much research. It seems to me to be a little early to attempt to define procedure. Ideals will undoubtedly develop as time goes on and many suggestions will occur to us.

Respectfully submitted,

H. VAN BUREN MAGONIGLE, Architect.